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Advancement of women

Report of the Working Group on the future operations of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women**

I. Introduction

1. The Working Group on the Future Operation of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/125 of 19 December 2001, by which the Assembly, inter alia, decided:

> "(a) To establish a working group composed of two governmental representatives from each of the five regional groups of the United Nations and one representative of the host country, the mandate of the working group being to make recommendations to the General Assembly before the end of the fifty-sixth session, for its consideration by the end of 2002, on the future operation of the Institute".

2. The Working Group is composed of representatives of the following 11 Member States: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Czech Republic, Dominican Republic (host country), El Salvador, Liechtenstein, Mongolia, Slovakia, Spain, Uganda and Venezuela.

3. The Group held eight meetings, on 22, 25 and 26 July and on 1, 2, 7, 9 and 12 August 2002.

4. The Working Group also held informal consultations in the course of its work.

5. At its 1st meeting, on 22 July 2002, the Working Group elected Inocencio F. Arias (Spain) as its Chairperson, Adriana P. Pulido Santana (Venezuela) as its Vice-Chairperson, and Samina Naz (Bangladesh) as its Rapporteur.

6. At the same meeting, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women made a statement. Comments were made by the representative of the Dominican Republic on the current situation of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW).

7. At the 2nd meeting, on 25 July, the members of the Working Group exchanged general views on the options and recommendations for the future operation of the Institute and the time frame and the nature of its mandate. The representative of the Board of Trustees of INSTRAW made a statement.

8. At its 3rd meeting, on 26 July, the Working Group decided to invite the representatives of various United Nations offices for consultations on the current situation of INSTRAW and on its future operations.

9. At its 4th to 6th and 8th meetings, on 1, 2, 7 and 12 August, the Group consulted with the following officials on the current situation and future operation of INSTRAW: the Under-Secretary-General for Economic

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and Social Affairs; the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services and other officials of the Office of Internal Oversight Services; the interim Director of INSTRAW; the Director of the Programme Planning and Budget Division, Office of Programme Planning, Budgets and Accounts, representing the Controller, as well as an official from the Economic, Social and Human Rights Service of the Division; the Director of the New York Office of the United Nations University; the Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women; and the Executive Officer of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

II. Assessment

10. In its deliberations, the Working Group took into account the following:

(a) Statute of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women;

(b) Assessment of the current financial crisis of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW/BT/1999/R.3);

(c) An evaluation by the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (A/54/156-E/1999/102);

(d) A report dated 25 May 2001 on the combined results of previous audits of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women;

(e) Report of the President of the Board of Trustees of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women note by the Secretary-General (E/1999/105);

(f) Report of the Secretary-General on the new structure and working method of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (A/54/500);

(g) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (A/55/385);

(h) Report of the Secretary-General on the revitalization and strengthening of INSTRAW (E/2001/76);

(i) Report of the Secretary-General on the critical situation of INSTRAW (A/56/279);

(j) Report of the Secretary-General on the audit of INSTRAW, conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/56/907);

(k) General Assembly resolution 54/140, on the revitalization and strengthening of INSTRAW, and resolutions 55/219 and 56/125 and decision 55/457, on the critical situation of INSTRAW;

(l) Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/54, on the revitalization of INSTRAW, and resolutions 2000/24 and 2001/40, on the revitalization and strengthening of INSTRAW;

(m) Draft resolution submitted to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly on programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (A/C.5/56/L.30).

Board of Trustees

11. The President of the Board of Trustees, taking advantage of her stay in New York, attended the first session of the Working Group. She stated that INSTRAW was the only body in the United Nations devoted to research and training for the advancement of women, a fact for consideration by the Working Group.

Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

12. The exchange of views with the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women was primarily centred on the relationship of her Office with the activities of INSTRAW, in particular the activities carried out by the Special Adviser with regard to the future operations of the Institute. The Working Group was also informed of the mandate of the Special Adviser as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for INSTRAW and the procedure for such an appointment.

13. The Special Adviser stated that the mandate of the Special Representative had not been spelled out. Members of the Working Group observed that, despite

this, the Special Adviser had undertaken a significant number of activities related to INSTRAW, ranging from fund-raising to the appointment of the Director. She had also represented the Secretary-General, ex officio, on the Board of Trustees of the Institute, as mandated by its Statute.

14. The Working Group found that there were contradictory accounts on the events surrounding the current crisis of INSTRAW. The Special Adviser pointed to the lack of resources as the source of the problems of the Institute, without elaborating on the causes for the drastic decline in voluntary contributions.

15. The overdue appointment of the Director by the Secretary-General was discussed at length with the Special Adviser. The Working Group concluded that this issue had not received the attention needed on the part of the Secretariat, despite the decisive role of the Director in fund-raising activities. Concerns were also expressed regarding the procedure for the appointment of the Director, in particular the interim nature of the current Director and the decision to hire retirees from the United Nations system to fulfil that role.

16. Contrary to what had been reflected in several reports dealing with the situation of INSTRAW, the Special Adviser stated that, indeed, INSTRAW had an important role to play within the United Nations machinery for the advancement of women.

17. The Working Group also found that there seemed to be an overlapping of activities between the Office of the Special Adviser and INSTRAW, and a lack of coordination and definition of the relationship between the two.

Interim Director of the Institute

18. The interim Director of INSTRAW informed the Working Group that her appointment came into effect in June 2002. Since then, she had visited, together with the Special Adviser, INSTRAW headquarters in the Dominican Republic only once. When asked about her presence in New York, she indicated that, as soon as the Working Group had finished its deliberations, she would undertake her responsibilities in the Dominican Republic.

19. Members of the Working Group requested information regarding the current activities of the Institute. The interim Director explained that, despite serious financial constraints, INSTRAW had been able to carry out some studies and to continue the expansion of the Gender Awareness Information and Networking System (GAINS). She explained that GAINS was at the heart of the working methodology of INSTRAW. However, members of the Working Group indicated that GAINS was conceived as a project activity that was to be funded separately and not as a methodology to be used by INSTRAW in carrying out its work. However, the interim Director stressed that GAINS was a working method, and had referred to it as a "methodology".

20. The interim Director also referred to the situation of the Institute from a managerial point of view, and explained some irregularities that she had found during her visit, and the corrective measures taken in that respect.

Office of Internal Oversight Services

21. The representatives of the Office of Internal Oversight Services informed the Working Group that the report contained in document A/56/907, as well as the recommendations contained therein, had been prepared by the Office while bearing in mind the resources available to sustain the activities of INSTRAW in the short term.

22. According to the Office, the most serious problems of INSTRAW were the lack of coordination with the United Nations Secretariat and the lack of policy direction. They attributed these partly to the absence of a clear mandate for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for INSTRAW and the delay in the appointment of the Director of the Institute. Members of the Working Group found it contradictory that the Office had not found the Special Representative's terms of reference but had still mandated her or him to undertake some of the recommendations presented in the report.

23. Members of the Working Group found that, while the issue of the lack of coordination among different actors of the United Nations system with regard to INSTRAW had been raised by several of the invited speakers, none of the reports on the situation of the Institute presented so far had reflected this situation. This was particularly relevant to the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The

representatives of the Office acknowledged this, and were in agreement with the members of the Working Group on the need to present a more balanced account of the situation of INSTRAW. The Working Group was of the opinion that it would be very useful to have a written account from the Office that would elaborate further on the issues that had been overlooked in its report, in particular the lack of coordination among several departments of the United Nations system with regard to INSTRAW and the way that this situation had undermined the reputation and functioning of the Institute.

United Nations Development Fund for Women

24. The Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) confirmed the lack of connection between UNIFEM and INSTRAW, which was apparent not only in the absence of joint action, but also in the lack of detailed knowledge by the Executive Director of UNIFEM with regard to GAINS. Similarly, she confirmed that the mandates of INSTRAW and UNIFEM were completely different, that being the reason why she would not favour a merger of the two. The Executive Director indicated that UNIFEM did not have a mandate to do research and that INSTRAW could do much in this field and in the field of training. She also highlighted the work carried out by UNIFEM jointly with other bodies and agencies of the United Nations and expressed the readiness and desire of UNIFEM to work together with INSTRAW in the near future.

United Nations University

25. The representative of the United Nations University confirmed that the University did not receive funds from the United Nations regular budget. The main sources of financing were voluntary contributions (at present, 57 countries contributed).

26. He expressed the general interest of the United Nations University (UNU) to develop a closer linkage with INSTRAW, and explained the legal basis for and viability of such a linkage. In reply to queries from members of the Working Group, he stated that the Institute's integration with UNU could be beneficial to the University.

27. Lastly, he informed the Working Group that a merger of INSTRAW with UNU would respect the location of the Institute's headquarters in the Dominican Republic.

Office of the Controller

28. The representatives of the office of the Controller explained to the Working Group the procedure for handling voluntary contributions, confirming that the office had a central role to play in the management of the Institute's resources. This implied that the office controlled the availability of sufficient funds to maintain the Institute and approved all of its expenditure.

29. The Working Group was informed of the financial situation of three other United Nations institutes that received funding from the United Nations regular budget.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

30. The Working Group had invited the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs to participate in an exchange of views on the situation of INSTRAW. However, because the Under-Secretary-General was not in New York at the time that the invitation was formulated, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs was represented by its Executive Officer who pointed out that her role was to supervise financial affairs and human resources, as well as to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations of the United Nations.

31. With regard to INSTRAW, she informed the Working Group that the Department did not receive detailed information on its financial situation or on vacancies.

32. The representative of the Department stated that her office managed an institute only when it was financed from the United Nations regular budget. When questioned by the Group if her office had been involved in the appointment of the interim Director of INSTRAW, she replied that her office had only been informed of the decision made. She also mentioned that the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs was the Special Representative for INSTRAW

and that the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women assisted him in that role.

33. On the future of INSTRAW, the representative preferred not to give an opinion. In response to questions posed by the Group, she confirmed that a merger of INSTRAW with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would be compatible with the autonomous character of the Institute, and that it would not be necessary to move the Institute's headquarters from the Dominican Republic to New York.

34. She also explained that United Nations regulations set out some limitations with regard to the hiring of retirees and confirmed that the appointment of an interim Director was due to the Institute's lack of financial resources.

35. Given that the representative of the Department was not in a position to respond to some of the questions of the Working Group, in particular with regard to the substantive aspects of the possibility of merging INSTRAW with the Department, the Group decided to invite the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs to address it.

36. During his presentation, the Under-Secretary-General referred to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development at Geneva and indicated that independence was the key factor for INSTRAW if it wanted to build up a presence in the field of research, and was also a factor with respect to fund-raising. Some members of the Working Group, however, pointed out that, in the case of INSTRAW, independence had not led to the mobilization of voluntary contributions. The Under-Secretary-General said that INSTRAW had a role to play, in particular in the field of training. On this issue, he stated that the Institute could provide training to personnel from various programmes and agencies of the United Nations system working in the field.

37. The Under-Secretary-General pointed out that there was a need for INSTRAW to find its area of concentration in terms of the research that it conducted. In that regard, he acknowledged that such research could be used by the Division for the Advancement of Women. However, he expressed doubts with regard to the viability of an institute that was wholly dependent on the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

III. Options for the future operation of the Institute

38. In order to fulfil its mandate, the Working Group considered all of the options concerning the future of INSTRAW that had been discussed in the past, as well as the options presented by the Office of Internal Oversight Services in its report (A/56/907). These options were:

(a) Closure of INSTRAW;

(b) Continuation of the status quo;

(c) Merger[1] with UNIFEM;

(d) Linkage with UNU;

(e) Merger/linkage with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Conclusions

39. After having considered closely the above-mentioned options, the Working Group reached conclusions with regard to each of them.

Closure

40. Several members of the Working Group were of the view that the mandate assigned it by the General Assembly in resolution 56/125 did not entail considering the possible closure of INSTRAW. However, this option was nevertheless considered in detail by the Group, in particular in the light of recommendation 2 contained in the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (see chap. VIII of A/56/907), which had been issued after the adoption of resolution 56/125. The exchange of views with the representatives of the Secretariat led the Working Group to the conclusion that INSTRAW could make a valuable and substantive contribution to the advancement of women within the United Nations system, if reformed and revitalized properly and if provided with the necessary financial and human resources to fulfil its mandate. The Working Group was of the view that, given the current presence of the United Nations system throughout the world, closing down a United Nations institute that was located in a developing country would send the wrong political signal. Moreover, at a juncture when gender issues were at the top of the United Nations agenda, it would

be inconsistent to close down the only United Nations institute devoted to research and training in respect of the advancement of women and gender equality.

41. This option was therefore dismissed.

Continuation of the status quo

42. The Working Group found that the current situation of INSTRAW was unsustainable, and concluded that continuation of the status quo was not viable.

43. This option was therefore dismissed.

Merger with the United Nations Development Fund for Women

44. In considering the option of a merger of INSTRAW with UNIFEM, the Working Group relied mainly on the presentations made by UNIFEM, the interim Director of INSTRAW and the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, as well as on the available documentation. The exchanges held made it clear that the mandates of the two bodies were quite different in nature and scope and that a merger, while technically feasible, was rather far-fetched and not desirable from a substantive point of view. It also became clear that the option of such a possible merger was considered obsolete by those directly involved. The Working Group thus concluded that a merger between UNIFEM and INSTRAW might not be beneficial and that it was at this point in time not considered desirable by either of the two bodies.

Merger with the United Nations University

45. The exchange held on the option of a merger with UNU made it clear that UNU considered a closer linkage of INSTRAW feasible and that there was general interest on the part of UNU in such a closer linkage. It also became clear that the nature of the mandate of INSTRAW fitted well with the overall objectives of UNU, in both terms of substance and terms of institutional arrangements, given that UNU had established a number of research and training centres and/or programmes. It was also pointed out that the incorporation of an existing institute into UNU would be a novel experience. It was assumed that in the event that such a linkage were to be decided, UNU would follow its established process in considering the establishment of a research institute. The process involved was estimated to take approximately one year. With regard to financial aspects which were crucial for the operation of INSTRAW, the Working Group noted in particular guiding principle No. 8 of UNU for establishing research and training centres or programmes, which stated that the centre or programme should be provided with adequate physical facilities and equipment for its establishment and continuing operation and be able to rely on a sustained source of core funding for its operations. The Group thus concluded that a closer linkage with UNU would not in itself resolve the financial problems that INSTRAW had been facing over past years.

Merger/linkage with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

46. The exchanges held on the option of a merger/linkage with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs made it clear that the Working Group had two sub-options to consider. One was the physical merger[1] of INSTRAW with the Department, the second was the linkage of INSTRAW to the Department.

(a) Merger

47. The exchanges on the option of a merger made it clear that divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs were conducting research work in the area of the advancement of women and that there was a substantive overlap with the work of INSTRAW. As far as the financial situation was concerned, a merger would entail the allocation to the Department of additional resources from the regular budget, which would require approval by the General Assembly. It was pointed out in this connection that part of the running costs of the Institute had been and were currently met by the Dominican Republic as host country.

48. It was considered that a merger would be likely to resolve the coordination problems which had been hampering the work of INSTRAW for some time. However, the Working Group also took note of the negative impact that this option would have on the visibility of INSTRAW and of the geographical dislocation associated with this option.

(b) Linkage

49. It became clear that a stronger linkage to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would not necessarily entail the geographical dislocation of

INSTRAW from the Dominican Republic. The desirability of such a linkage would be considered by the Department on the basis of the criterion of "value added." However, the Department did not make any comments on the criterion at the present stage. In terms of financing, this option would entail the allocation of additional resources from the regular budget and, consequently, its approval by the General Assembly.

IV. Main issues regarding the future operation of the Institute

50. Members of the Working Group were of the view that the situation of INSTRAW should not be evaluated in a vacuum, but rather in the broader context of the competences of all of the actors that comprise the United Nations machinery for the advancement of women and gender equality.

51. In discussing the various options and in reaching its recommendation, the Working Group also discussed repeatedly the issues below, which were considered crucial for the future operation of INSTRAW.

52. **Autonomous status**. Autonomous status has been called a "mixed blessing" in the past.[2] The Working Group concluded that, while autonomous status was in principle desirable for a research institute and, most probably, beneficial when INSTRAW was first established, it was at this point in time a major disadvantage for INSTRAW and should therefore be abolished.

53. **Board of Trustees**. The role of the Board of Trustees was reviewed carefully by the Working Group and it was concluded that the Board, for a variety of reasons, had not fulfilled or had not been able to fulfil its broad responsibilities under the Statute of INSTRAW. The Working Group also considered that the role of the Board was closely linked to the autonomous status of INSTRAW and that the Board should therefore be abolished simultaneously.

54. **Revitalization of INSTRAW**. There was a broad agreement among the members of the Working Group as well as the representatives of the Secretariat that INSTRAW could play a useful role and make a substantive contribution to the advancement of women within the United Nations system. However, this could only be achieved through a radical reform of the current structure of INSTRAW (see paras. 52-53 above), a sound financial basis for its work and the revitalization of the Institute in substantive terms. Such revitalization was the primary responsibility of INSTRAW itself, but should be supported by other actors, such as Member States, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNIFEM and the relevant intergovernmental bodies.

55. **Financing**. The Working Group concluded that INSTRAW could only remain operational if its financing were secured on a long-term basis. This would allow for the appointment of a permanent Director and the creation of the post of Deputy Director of the Institute, which in turn would enable the Institute to carry out the necessary steps to revitalize its role and to conduct concerted and consistent fund-raising activities. Given past history, the Working Group concluded that part of the financial basis should be provided from within the regular budget of the United Nations. The Working Group noted in this context that other research institutes linked to the United Nations system were provided with resources from the regular budget upon approval by the General Assembly. The Working Group concluded therefor that the funding of core activities[3] from within the regular budget, at an estimated annual cost of US$ 500,000, accompanied by the abolition of the autonomous status of the Institute, would place INSTRAW in a situation comparable to that of other United Nations research institutes.

56. **Restructuring**. The Working Group recommends that the restructuring and revitalization of INSTRAW, as well as the consideration of any possible linkage to other institutions within the United Nations system, be undertaken as provided for in the context of the Secretary-General's 1997 programme for reform and in accordance with the action proposed in his report (A/51/950, sect. VI, action 29), which had never been taken into consideration in the past despite the serious financial and other difficulties of INSTRAW.

V. Recommendation

57. The Working Group recommends the linkage of INSTRAW to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, under the direct authority of the Under-Secretary-General. In this connection, the following measures should be taken:

(a) Mandating the Economic and Social Council to amend the Statute of INSTRAW in accordance with paragraphs 52, 53 and 55 of the present report (i.e. the creation of the post of Deputy Director with specific fund-raising responsibilities);

(b) Allocating an amount of US$ 500,000 from the regular budget of the United Nations to finance the core activities of the Institute, so as to give to it the same status as other institutes of the United Nations system;

(c) Maintaining the Institute's location in the Dominican Republic;

(d) Examining the feasibility of establishing an advisory board composed of Member States to replace the Board of Trustees;

(e) Creating the post of Deputy Director with specific fund-raising responsibilities;

(f) Establishing a liaison for INSTRAW in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs;

(g) Requesting the Secretary-General to appoint a Director to be based at INSTRAW headquarters in the Dominican Republic;

(h) Calling upon INSTRAW to take concrete measures to revitalize its activities and to work closely and in a coordinated manner with other United Nations bodies working in the field of gender equality and advancement of women, in particular the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UNIFEM, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Commission on the Status of Women etc.

Notes

[1] The meaning of the word "merger" was discussed on several occasions in the Working Group. For the purposes of this report, "merger" means the physical incorporation of INSTRAW into an existing body and therefore its dislocation from its current host country. The more general term "linkage" indicates an institutional link with an existing body, which does not make a dislocation necessary.

[2] The term was already being used by the Joint Inspection Unit in 1999 (see A/54/156-E/1999/102, sect. VII).

[3] The Working Group was advised that the term "core activities" in the present context covered the salaries of the Director and Deputy Director, as well as Professional staff.